

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10
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FM AMEMBASSY LIMA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9186
INFO AMEMBASSY QUITO
AMEMBASSY LA PAZ
AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO

C O N F I D E N T I A L LIMA 2346

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PGOV PINT PE
SUBJ: AP WILL NOT PARTICIPATE IN CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS

REF: (A) LIMA 2258 NOTAL, (B) LIMA 2141

1. ONE OF THE MAJOR CENTRIST POLITICAL PARTIES, ACCION POPULAR (AP) HAS DECIDED NOT REPEAT NOT TO TAKE PART IN PERU'S JUNE 4 CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS. AP'S MARCH 16 ANNOUNCEMENT NOTED THAT PARTY LEADER AND EX-PRESIDENT FERNANDO BELAUNDE TERRY HAD DEMANDED THAT THE ARMED FORCES AND THE GOVERNMENT MAKE PUBLIC THEIR INTENTION TO RESPECT TO THE SOVEREIGN WILL OF THE PEOPLE IN ELECTING THE ASSEMBLY IN ORDER TO PERMIT AN IMMEDIATE RETURN TO A CONSTITUTIONAL REGIME (REF A). AP EXPRESSED CONCERN THAT THE MILITARY GOVERNMENT WOULD CONTINUE RULING BY DECREE THROUGHOUT AND AFTER THE ASSEMBLY'S TERM AND THEREFORE HAD SOUGHT CLARIFICATION OF THIS SITUATION. WHEN SUCH CLARIFICATIONS WERE NOT FORTHCOMING, THE DECISION WAS TAKEN TO WITHDRAW FROM THE CONTEST.

2. AP LEADER BELAUNDE TOLD THE PRESS THAT THE PARTY'S WITHDRAWAL WAS NOT A BOYCOTT OF THE ASSEMBLY ELECTION AND
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THAT MEMBERS OF THE PARTY WERE FREE TO VOTE HOWEVER THEY SAW FIT, NOR WOULD AP REFUSE TO RECOGNIZE A CONSTITUTION APPROVED IN THE ASSEMBLY WITHOUT ITS PARTICIPATION.

3. AP'S WITHDRAWAL LEFT 12 OF THE 13 ELIGIBLE PARTIES TURNING OVER THEIR LISTS OF CANDIDATES TO THE ELECTORAL COMMISSION BY THE MARCH 16 DEADLINE. THE LEFTIST PARTIES

FAILED TO REACH AGREEMENT ON UNITY AND EACH PRESENTED A SEPARATE LIST OF CANDIDATES. ACCION POPULAR SOCIALISTA, AS A RESULT OF A CHALLENGE (REF B), ADOPTED THE NEW NAME OF ACCION REVOLUCIONARIA SOCIALISTA (AND THE UNFORTUNATE ACRONYM OF ARS) AND WAS INSCRIBED.

4. COMMENT: AP'S SURPRISE MOVE REFLECTS THE DILEMMA IN WHICH THE PARTY AND BELAUNDE HAVE ALWAYS FOUND THEMSELVES. BY HEADING THE AP LIST AND PARTICIPATING IN THE ASSEMBLY, THE LAST ELECTED PERUVIAN PRESIDENT WAS ENDORSING THE MILITARY GOVERNMENT'S TWO STEP POLITICAL PROGRAM (THE ISSUE THAT FROM THE BEGINNING HAS PROMPTED THE AMBIVALENT ATTITUDE OF THE PARTY TOWARD THE WHOLE CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY PROCESS AND CAUSED SERIOUS DIVISIONS WITHIN THE PARTY). IN PRACTICAL POLITICAL TERMS, BELAUNDE ALSO RAN THE RISK OF AN UNFAVORABLE SHOWING, ESPECIALLY AGAINST HIS MAIN CONTENDER ON THE CENTER RIGHT, BEDOYA REYES. ON THE OTHER HAND, BELAUNDE HIMSELF IS AP'S MOST IMPORTANT ASSET; NOT HEADING THE ASSEMBLY LIST WOULD HAVE SHARPLY REDUCED ITS VOTE. IN THE END, AP AND BELAUNDE OPTED OUT OF THE GAME, PERHAPS TO RESUME THEIR ROLE AS "LOYAL OPPOSITION" TO THE MILITARY REGIME. IT IS TOO EARLY TO JUDGE THE FULL IMPACT OF THE WITHDRAWAL OF ONE OF PERU'S MAJOR POLITICAL FORCES ON THE ELECTORAL PROCESS AND THE RETURN TO DEMOCRATIC RULE, ALTHOUGH IT STILL APPEARS LIKELY THAT THE JUNE ELECTIONS WILL GO FORWARD ON SCHEDULE. SOMEWHAT REASSURING IS BELAUNDE'S DECISION TO FREE THE AP VOTE (RATHER

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THAN PUSH THE BLANK BALLOT PROTEST APPROACH) AS IS HIS ANNOUNCEMENT THAT AP WILL RESPECT THE NEW CONSTITUTION. IT IS UNFORTUNATE, HOWEVER, THAT BELAUNDE HAS REFUSED TO LEND HIS CONSIDERABLE PRESTIGE TO LEGITIMIZE THE GOP'S POLITICAL PLAN. ASSUMING THE SIGNIFICANT NUMBERS OF AP SUPPORTERS GO TO THE POLLS, BEDOYA REYES' PPC AND, TO A LESSER DEGREE, APRA WOULD BE THE MAJOR BENEFICIARIES OF AP'S DECISION, CONSOLIDATING SOMEWHAT THE CENTER AND CENTER RIGHT AGAINST THE SPLINTERED LEFT. EMBASSY WILL REPORT SEPARATELY ON SIGNIFICANCE OF ELECTORAL LISTS AND CANDIDATES.

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